Mr. David Fanning, producer
Frontline
WGBH-TV
Boston, Mass.

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
2/28/90

Dear Mr. Fanning,

Your interesting, informative and well-done study of Yassir Arafat brought information about him to many Americans who knew nothing about him and thus is valuable, yet the show itself made a number of basic and I think serious errors that misinformed the viewers. Because these shows are repeated I hope you will consider rectifying some of the unfactual and misleading statements. The tragedy of that area of the world is going to continue, for reasons only slightly indicated in the show and the actualities are unknown to most Americans.

You referred to Israel and its occupied territories as "old Palestine." This is factually incorrect and seriously deceptive. All that territory is less than a quarter of old Palestine. Not only should this have become apparent in your research - you had an appropriate opoortunity for dealing with it when you reported the PLO's effort to take Jordan over. (And if my recollection is correct, understating Arafat's involvement in it.)

When Britain took the Ottoman empire over after World War I it had made promises to both Jews and Arabs about Palestine. British anti-Semites prevented keeping the promise to Jews, the Balfour Declaration, but Trans-Jorsan was established in more than three-quarters of "old Palestine." It got its name because it is all of Palestine across the Jordan River. To obscure reality, Hussein eliminated the "Trans" from the name.

Whatever the political reason for Israeli governments playing this down, probably involving hopes for an ultimate solution coming from Hussein, it is a fact that from old Palestine the Arab state was created.

You stated that Arafat, responding to Washington's pressure, guaranteed the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security. And you used some footage of his statement. But you did not use the footage in which he was quite careful not to say what you reported he said, the statement that Washington, knowing better, accepted and most of the media has been misrepresnted since.

Had he guaranteed the peace and security of the State of Israel, as he well knew (and in my belief does not intend anyway) he would have faced the fate of Abdullah, whose assassination made Hussein king, and of Sadat, the only Muslim ruler to agree to a peace that recognized the State of Israel. If you look at the footage you have you will see and hear that instead Arafat spoke of the "people" of Israel. Thus, as those who would kill him for recognizing the State's existence, as the PLO's charter keeps him from doing in any event, he pointed it did not. He could tell them, for example, that the rights of the people could and would be preserved, as Muslims view that preservation, in an Arab state. Which is the unaltered objective of the PLO.

You were too uncritical in handling his abandonment of terrorism and reported this as a fact. It is not. He abandoned such terrorism as the airport massacres and the kidnapping and murder of diplomats. The terrorism against Israel continues, only he says it is not terrorism. It has never stopped.

You fudged over the question of peace. If by some remote and entirely improbable chance Israel and the PLO or any other Arabs did agree to a peace treaty, what peace would there be for Israel with the rest of the Muslim world, except Egypt, persisting in a state of war with Israel? Without the entire Muslim world recognizing and agreeing to peace with the State of Israel it will have no peace. Peace for them means only recognizing the State of Israel and whether or not any of those government would want that, not one dares have it because all know there is no surviving it. Until this changes, in my opinion, there can be and there will be no real peace. For Israel and that part of the world.

Are you related to that fine fellow, Paul Fanning, who produced the Jerry Williams show on WBBM-AM?

Sincerely, Harold Weisberg
Harold Weisberg